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262 "The villagers generally feed themselves well. Of course, it depends upon how rich the family is. But usually we Dragalevtsy people do not think much about the money we give for food and drink. We are not stingy. The people here eat beans, potatoes, rice, cheese, milk, and meat. We do not use tea as food, for it is only water and does not satisfy us."

Here is what another informant added:

"Indeed there is variety in the diet throughout the year. During the summer months we use mainly vegetables produced at home or bought from the market. In the winter we eat potatoes, beans, and conserved foods [chiefly pickles]. Meat, milk, and rice are eaten throughout the whole year. We eat few eggs because we sell most of our eggs in Sofia. Since so many of us keep cows we naturally have begun to give our children milk to drink. We all are very fond of *kiselo mleko* [Bulgarian "sour milk"], which we eat with a spoon during the winter. In the summer it is thinned with water and mixed with garlic, walnuts, and chopped cucumber and is the dish [called *tarator*] that we most prefer on a hot day in the field. Since most of our dishes are stews we use a great deal of bread, which is baked by the women once a week in the ovens standing in the yards just for that purpose."

I had seen a number of large vegetarian restaurants in the city, but the peasants dismissed this Tolstoyan influence in a sentence:

"The people of Dragalevtsy are not so foolish as to eat no meat, for how can man be strong and able to work if he does not eat meat?"

In spite of this point of view the fact remains that the diet is largely vegetarian except for the traditional pig at Christmas, a lamb on Saint George's Day (May 6), milk, and cheese.

264 Food is served either on a *trapeza* (a piece of cloth on the floor) or on the *sofra,* the low table previously described. It was a rare experience to have one's first meal with a peasant family. To begin with, there were no individual plates or dishes; instead, one satisfied his hunger from the nearest dish from which three or four others might be eating. If a chicken had been boiled, the spoons struggled for favorite pieces of fowl; if there was chicken broth, even of a particularly delicious flavor, vinegar was added in quantity to make it

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palatable to peasant taste. If the bread supply gave out at the table, the diners sat calmly without eating until the new loaf was brought in, for it was almost impossible for them to eat unless holding a piece of bread in the left hand. Dunking was the approved method of disposing of the juice of a stew. When eating, one was apt to get a greasy coating on the lip; the accepted technique was to scrape this off with a piece of bread already on its way into the mouth. Forks and small spoons were used only when there were guests. But why should table manners not be simple and direct?

"Knives for everybody are not used. There is one knife at the table, but people use their hands, for we peasants say, 'For what did God give the fingers to man if he does not use them to feed himself?' "

As for the preparation of the food:

"Usually it is the duty of the oldest woman in the family to prepare the food, because she knows the best how to cook and she can cook most deliciously of all. In case she is sick, then her daughter-in-law or her daughter cooks. If there are not such, then the man cooks." Here my informant sniffed and added scornfully, "Of course, in such a case dry food is eaten chiefly, but even the men can cook at least some of the dishes."

I asked another woman who really "knew her place," as a Dragalevtsy man would say, whether men could cook:

"Of course, men can do everything woman does, but woman cannot do everything men do. Who cooks for those men that are shepherds or work in the forests but they themselves? Men do not need women half as much as women need men. Yet we all recognize that cooking is for the women, not for the men."

No matter what time of day I entered a village home the *domakinya* (housewife) with unfailing and genuine hospitality offered me food or drink. I began to wonder when the people had their regular meals and found that some homes had no regular mealtimes; instead, people got up and took a piece of bread or anything else available whenever they were hungry. In most families, however, about nine o'clock in the morning a meal called *ruchok* was served to all; at about two, dinner was served, and two hours after sunset the people gathered for supper. One villager put it this way:

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264 "When we work in the fields we eat five times daily: as soon as we reach the place we have a light lunch *(zakuska)*, at nine we have the *ruchok*, at one dinner, at five another *zakuska*, and in the evening after finishing work we have supper. We older people don't eat between meals but let the children do so if they are hungry."

262 252 From time to time during my stay in the village I tried to teach the tavern cook some simple and uncomplicated western dish to vary the biting peasant food. She tried faithfully but unsuccessfully to comply. After one such hopeless but courteous attempt she read me a little lesson in village menus:

"We Dragalevtsy people are pretty conservative in everything and have added no new dishes to our menu. The western combinations which people eat in Sofia are tasteless and slimy. If one doesn't use lots of salt, hot pepper, and vinegar, then the food has no taste at all."

273 Beverages other than milk and wine made little appeal. Wine was much in evidence on holidays or when there were guests. An average village home would use from 250 to 300 quarts of wine a year. Most of the *rakiya* was drunk either at the taverns or on festive occasions. In commenting on the liquor consumption of the village one man said:

"We are not such fools as not to drink wine, for the wine is transformed into blood and gives strength to man."

000 Someone has said that a house does not become a home until it knows a birth, a wedding, and a death. In other words, it is more than plaster walls, crude furniture, and steaming food. It is even more an association of memories deeply rooted in family crises.

844 [E9] A frequently recurring crisis in Dragalevtsy was childbirth, which always took place in a home, never in a hospital. Usually it was the home in which the couple lived, for only rarely did the wife return to her paternal home for the event. When a woman learned that she was pregnant, she told the fact only to her own mother and to her husband, embarrassment preventing further disclosure. The mother-in-law learned about it a month later, for in the words of one of the older village men:

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